
Stateville inmates can be licensed barbers

By Frank Vaisvilas, Correspondent February 12, 2014

Inmates at Stateville Correctional Center can now be trained as licensed barbers as part of prison officials' attempts to rehabilitate criminals for re-entry into society.

Programs such as this have helped cut the repeat offender rate in Illinois by eight percent over the last two years, according to Tom Shaer, director of communications for the Illinois Department of Corrections.

"This is all part of the plan," Shaer said.

IDOC Director Salvador Godinez said 40 percent of the inmate population in the state are scheduled to be released within a year. He said it's better to have those ex-offenders trained to do something productive.

The barber training program at Stateville has existed for about 30 years, but this year's class of 15 students will be the first to be able to obtain an official state license to cut hair.

One of those students is Giovonn Jones, 32, who's originally from Harvey. He said he feels blessed to participate in the program.

"We grew up poor," Jones said. "But, now, I can work to provide for my daughter."

He said he hopes to be released in a few years if his court appeals are successful.

Jones' projected parole date is not until 2050, according to IDOC, for his conviction of aggravated criminal sexual assault and home invasion with a firearm.

Student Patrick Davis, 33, who's originally from Chicago, said he hopes to open his own barbershop one day.

"It's a great opportunity," Davis said of the training program. "This program not only teaches to become a barber, but it helped in my growth and maturing as a person."

He said he hopes to be released in four to five years. Davis' projected parole date is in 2034 for a murder conviction.

The class is taught by Bobby Mattison, who also owns a barbershop in Harvey called Bronx Cuts.

Madison said the program's inmates are well-behaved. And although the inmates have access to clippers and other sharp objects, he said no piece of equipment has ever been stolen.

"It was a long time coming," he said of the new licensing eligibility for students. "That's something no one can ever take away from them."